

The Effects of Political Cynicism, Political Information Efficacy and Media Consumption on Intended Voter Participation

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Abstract

This study examines the impact that political cynicism, political information efficacy, and media consumption have on voter participation. Through the use of an online social network, 238 participants completed a survey that included scales of media consumption levels, political information efficacy, political cynicism, and overall cynicism. Political information efficacy and political cynicism accounted for a 19.5% variance in likelihood to vote, a contradictory finding to previous studies that indicate that media consumption is more significant to voter turnout. The results suggested that the leading source from which most participants obtained their political information from was social media sites followed by online newspapers and news sites. Those citizens not affiliated with a party (N = 46) seem to have lower political information efficacy than those with an affiliation. Minimal differences were found in relation to ethnicity and political cynicism. Political cynicism was found to be different among different political affiliations, specifically when comparing the much higher level of political cynicism amongst non-partisans (N = 46) and to the lower levels found in Democrats (N = 110). Overall cynicism and political cynicism were correlated, but political cynicism, not overall cynicism, appears to drive voters away from the voting booths.

In 2012, more than 40% of U.S. citizens did not vote in the presidential election (McDonald, 2012). According to a 2012 Pew Research Center study, 36% of these nonvoters were 18-29 years old, despite this demographic being only 21%

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of the country's population (McDonald, 2012). While this demographic has shown an increase in participation in the last two presidential elections (Pew Research, 2012b), this percentage shows they are still underrepresented in the voting booths. This same report found that many nonvoters, including these young citizens, were knowledgeable on issues such as gay marriage and the 2010 Affordable Care Act (Pew Research, 2012a), but this knowledge did not translate to votes. If many nonvoters are so knowledgeable on issues important to the election, what stopped them from turning in their ballots? From an outsider's perspective, these numbers could give the perception that U.S. citizens do not care about politics in their country, but this may not be true. The one definitive truth told in these numbers is that there is a problem with voter turnout in the United States.

It is hard to say what or who is to blame for this problem. The country has been facing a recession and many U.S. citizens have become disillusioned with how the government can help them. The inconvenience of voting may also discourage U.S. citizens from casting their vote (Ghose, 2012). Other potential voters may not understand politics, so they figure they have no reason to get involved (Weeks, 2012). And some may simply opt out as they have no faith or trust that the government will listen to them (Ghose, 2012; Weeks, 2012). While the factors that may be affecting low voter turnout in the United States are many, this paper will focus on three variables related to this problem: media consumption, political information efficacy, and cynicism. Could it be that some U.S. citizens do not go to the polls because they simply do not trust politics? Or perhaps they are uninformed and would rather not vote?

Literature Review

With this research, we consider the possibility of political information efficacy and cynicism to be affected by the increasing presence of the media in the lives of U.S. citizens. The media presents an opportunity for struggling U.S. citizens to tune out important current events and focus on something that matters much less. Recently, reality television has taken over the airwaves. In a 2010 ranking of the top 20 shows on television, 75% are reality shows (Carter). On the other side of this coin, those interested in current events are constantly bombarded with information and some may have trouble focusing on what is important and deciding what information is true.

Depending on the type, media may affect voting behavior in either a negative or positive way (Lee, 2005; Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). As voters consume more information, their efficacy will affect their trust in politics

(Anderson, 2010). As political cynicism is affected, voting behavior will also be influenced (Pinkleton & Austin, 2004; Fu, Mou, Miller, & Jalette, 2011). Media consumption, political information efficacy, and political cynicism all have an effect on the political process. The constant change in society requires that these three variables be examined to better understand how they are currently affecting the voter turnout of today.

Media Consumption

The media and availability of political information have amplified, from television and radio to Internet, and, most recently, social media. According to a study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2011), television was the leading information source in 2010, followed by the Internet and newspaper. The findings also indicate that the Internet is on the rise as a source of information. The consumption of these mediums of communication and its effect on voter participation have conceived interest among scholars. Media consumption occurs when an individual obtains information from the mediums of communication: television, radio, newspaper, magazines and Internet. Previous studies have supported that there is a relationship with media consumption and voter participation. However, the positive or negative slope of the relationship depends on the medium for information. Scholars Drew and Weaver have dedicated a majority of their research experience to the effects of media on presidential elections.

In their 2005 study, Drew and Weaver found that newspapers had a significant correlation with the likelihood to vote. According to the researchers, in the 2004 election television news and newspapers were the mediums most strongly correlated with voting. Importantly, Drew and Weaver's study examined that newspapers alone were not a significant factor for voter participation in 2004. However, their previous studies indicate that newspapers had an important relationship with voter participation. The scholars also observed that paying attention to print reporting on politics is also related to a higher intent to vote.

Newspapers are considered in-depth media; perhaps that is the reason they positively affect voter participation. Lee (2005) found that individuals who depend on in-depth media have more trust in the government. In addition, Lee's (2005) study supported that in-depth media increases efficacy and reduces cynicism. Other research also observes that newspapers produce higher knowledge and therefore reduce cynicism (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). Both

efficacy and cynicism affect voter participation; therefore, the media that affects these other two variables may affect voter participation.

The broadcast mediums, such as television and radio, provide contrasting results. Pinkleton and Austin's research (2001) supported that those who obtained information from sources not perceived to be important, such as television and radio news, were unaffected by involvement. Television and radio are not considered to be as important because they report political news on a surface level. Lee (2005) explained that television has superficial and scandal coverage of political news and therefore creates higher cynicism levels (pp. 426-427). Similarly, Ansolabehere (1994) found that exposure to television candidate polls does not influence voter participation but it does influence political candidate preferences and electoral support. Although polling and news in general may not influence voter participation, there is one aspect of television that may increase participation. Soontae et al. (2006) notes that exposure to debates increases issue knowledge. Issue knowledge is defined as the comprehension about issues within the political system. Thus, issue knowledge is a form of efficacy that in turn can affect voter participation.

Similar to television, political radio coverage has produced varied results. When political radio produces in-depth coverage, it leads to higher trust in the government. Lee's research (2005) supported that those who obtained information from in depth radio sources such as NPR had a higher trust in the government. However, other types of talk radio produced the opposite results.

With the recent rise of the Internet, contrasting findings of its effects on voters have also been observed. Lee (2005) found that the Internet maintained a relationship with political trust and cynicism. Similarly, Kaid and Postelnicu (2005) supported this finding in their study of young voters and the Internet. They found that the Internet did not lower the level of the participant's cynicism but it did increase the participant's knowledge about political issues and candidates. The possible explanation is that "the Internet provides users with additional information about the ads, often opposing points of view" and that in turn creates a lack of belief in their role in the political system (Kaid & Postelnicu, 2005, p. 274)). Similarly, Han (2008) found that the general exposure to the Internet is not related to voter participation. However, the study supported that those who willingly inquired the Internet for information raised the voter turnout in the election in 2000. Han observed that those who directly seek the Internet for information may be more politically inclined, and therefore would have more willingness to participate.

Political Information Efficacy

Political information efficacy is concerned with the trust and faith a citizen has in a body of government that influences their civic participation based on their personal understanding, as well as their faith that they can influence political affairs. Scholars explain that there are two components to this concept: internal and external efficacy. Internal efficacy is the belief that one's own personal actions can influence the political process. External efficacy is the belief in the government's responsibility to the concerns of the citizenry (Anderson, 2010, p. 63). During campaigns, political information is disseminated to all citizens via various mediums—it is found at work, school, coffee shops, amongst friends, on the streets and especially in people's homes. Therefore, political information efficacy is another factor that can affect voter turnout.

Since there are different sources for obtaining political knowledge, the amount and quality of information gained influences political efficacy (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). Tan (1980) found that a voter who is well informed about the election would most likely vote. Therefore, if the media disseminates information that provides familiarity and application to citizen's lives, and they also address the public and civic issues at hand, then there will be an enhancement in political efficacy (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). However, in a study conducted by Kaid et al. (2007), a young voter's efficacy is turmoiled by the various avenues of political knowledge. These researchers found that young voters are less likely to feel confident about their political knowledge, which then makes them less likely to vote. Their perceived lack of knowledge is due to the gap in understanding all of the issues, therefore some would rather not engage in the political process. Perhaps a better understanding of how media should focus the campaign messages will help solidify the political knowledge of young voters. Kaid et al. (2007) defined political information efficacy to include a voter's perceived knowledge on the issues as an important factor on engagement in the political process (p. 1096).

Many studies are conducted on the basis of discovering the predictors that influence why people engage or do not engage in the political process through voter participation. As a result of these studies, it has been found that voting is one way to measure an individual's expressed belief (internal efficacy) of their influence on the political process (Hackett & Omotto, 2009). Hackett & Omotto's (2009) research also indicates that the actual act of voting is much more important to people, than the results of the election. This act is exclusive of one's personal feelings and abilities to participate in the political process. However, increasing their likelihood to vote via various mediums does not imply

that the voter will act on it. Therefore, further research is needed to measure political behavior.

Previous research also indicates that not only media and channels of political sources influence political information efficacy, but also the “sense of community” matters in political behaviors and attitudes (Anderson, 2010, p. 79). Individuals’ social environment may influence daily life decisions. According to McMillian and Chavis (1986), sense of community is defined as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment together” (p. 9). Further support of this sense of community factor is seen in the study conducted by Nickerson and Rogers (2010). Their study involved implementing intentions to vote through the means of a voting plan proposed via telephone calls during the 2008 presidential elections. Nickerson and Rogers (2010) observed that their influence on voter participation was not effective on a multiple eligible voter household when compared to a single eligible voter household. The difference was significant as the researchers speculate that voters who live together and share political interest will most likely make plans and encourage each other to vote rather than those voters who live alone and have to adjust their schedules to accommodate the voting process (Nickerson & Rogers, 2010, p. 198).

Other studies have also detailed that there is a positive and significant relationship between internal efficacy and sense of community (Anderson, 2010). Since the sense of community is dominant in its nature, an individual can be negatively impacted to the point of removing or disassociating oneself from the dominance of social values and beliefs which also impacts the individual’s efficacy and, in turn, likelihood to vote. Cultural estrangement is based on the gap between personal values and societal values, which can be significantly diverse. The greater the gap, “the more people feel estranged from society” (Hackett & Omotto, 2009, p. 299). This may happen as a result of the personal investment made by the voter for the candidate of choice, who ultimately does not win. The loss is taken personally and the voter feels rejected, which could lead to further loss in efficacy and possibly cynicism.

Political Cynicism

Political cynicism is another variable that can affect voter turnout. This term can be defined in a number of ways. Agger, Goldstein, and Pearl (1961) defined political cynicism as the point when the word politics “symbolize[s] something negative rather than something positive” (p. 477). The term has evolved into

many different meanings, including those relating to disconnect of politics (Strama, 1998, p. 75), distrust in politicians (Fu, Mou, Miller, & Jalette, 2011, p. 46), and lack of confidence in the government (Valentino, Beckman, & Buhr, 2001, p. 349).

Political cynicism has been shown to affect voter turnout, but results are mixed on whether the effect is negative or positive. Some studies show that the more politically cynical a respondent is, the less likely they are to vote (Pinkleton & Austin, 2004). Others have found that political cynicism may actually increase a respondent's likelihood to vote because cynicism does not lead to apathy, but instead to critical thinking about politics (Fu et al., 2011). In other words, "healthy skepticism" may be in play rather than cynicism (Pinkleton & Austin, 2004, p. 322).

In early studies of political cynicism, researchers wanted to know how age, income, and political affiliation related to the political cynicism of a respondent (Agger et al., 1961). While these variables are still important to the formation of political cynicism, the media has become more available, leading many researchers to believe that the most important variables in relation to cynicism are information efficacy and media exposure levels (Adriaansen, van Praag, & de Vreese, 2010; Fu et al., 2011).

Most of the current research on political cynicism focuses on what the public knows and how the public receives their information. In relation to political information efficacy, the popular view is that the more the public thinks they know, the less cynical they will be (McKinney & Rill, 2009). However, some researchers have found the opposite to be true. While studying the effects of the CNN/YouTube 2008 presidential debates, Lariscy, Tinkham, and Sweetser (2011) found that as political information efficacy rises, so does political cynicism. In another study on the 2008 presidential campaign, Hanson, Haridakis, Cunningham, Sharma, and Ponder (2010) also found that the more a respondent thought they knew, the more politically cynical the respondent would be.

One possible reason for the rise in cynicism in relation to political information efficacy is that some viewers may realize they are not receiving the full story. In a 2001 article, Valentino et al. found media framing to be a major factor on political cynicism. In this study, the respondents viewed different types of fake campaign coverage (Valentino et al., 2001). Less educated and nonpartisan respondents, in particular, were less likely to vote after viewing the coverage (Valentino et al., 2001). This shows that political cynicism levels may

be less about how informed a person is, but instead more about how interested a person is in politics.

On the other hand, how informed a person is has potential to have the opposite effect. A 2008 study by deVreese and Elenbaas examined how metacoverage affected respondents' levels of political cynicism. Metacoverage deals with the entwinement of the reporter in their political news coverage (deVreese et al., 2008, p. 286). Similar to the previously discussed article, their results showed that respondents had an increase of political cynicism (deVreese et al., 2008). Those who were more interested in politics were even more heavily influenced than those who were not (deVreese et al., 2008).

In another study related to media framing, Kensicki (2004) studied newspaper coverage of three issues (pollution, poverty, and incarceration). She found that the newspapers either remain neutral or place blame when discussing these issues, but rarely offered solutions. Kensicki (2004, p. 66) concluded that omitting solutions in news coverage might be causing frustration among viewers. This frustration might lead to cynicism not only towards politics, but also towards all other aspects of life.

Despite the emphasis some early political cynicism researchers placed on overall cynicism (Agger et al., 1961), few current researchers examine how overall cynicism can affect political cynicism. Hansen et al. (2010) found something similar to this notion when examining how social networking sites and blogs affected respondents. While they did find some relationships, one surprising result showed that a person's tendency to be politically cynical could be best predicted by their individual characteristics (Hansen et al., 2010).

Study Rationale

Scholars have agreed that the medium of communication affects voter participation. Channels and the availability of those means are constantly changing; however, one factor that remains static is the effect on voter participation. Because this variable is constantly moving it is important to measure its outcomes on our current political environment. This leads us to believe:

H₁: There is a relationship between intended voter participation and media consumption.

Political information efficacy is another variable that affects voter participation turnout. Based on previous research, there is a direct correlation between political information efficacy and the likelihood to vote. Since trust

and efficacy are closely related, it has been found that there are social factors that influence and organically raise political information efficacy levels (Anderson, 2010) which may need to be researched further in order to develop and possibly foster their influence further on voter participation. This leads us to believe:

H₂: There is a relationship between intended voter participation and political information efficacy.

Political cynicism has a number of different factors, including media consumption, attitude, and political efficacy. Each of these factors influence how a person feels about politics. A negative attitude towards politics definitely affects voter turnout. Some theorize that political cynicism discourages voter turnout (Pinkleton & Austin, 2004). Others speculate that political cynicism may lead to more critical thinking, which increases likelihood to vote. Clearly, previous research on the effects of political cynicism on voters is inconclusive. This leads us to believe:

H₃: There is a relationship between intended voter participation and political cynicism.

Methods

Through the use of Facebook, participants were asked to complete the survey, which included a scale of media consumption levels, a scale on political information efficacy, and a scale on both political cynicism and overall cynicism (faith in people). Respondents were reached through a network sample, allowing thousands of potential voters throughout the United States to access to the survey. Upon completion of the survey, respondents of different political parties were asked to share the online survey on their Facebook pages. Network samples provide the means to reach out to individuals who are part of a difficult to identify population (Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2008). This gave the researchers the opportunity to collect information from a more politically diverse sample than would be available to them without the use of a social network. While the process was not random, it was inclusive because all respondents that had access to the survey were given an equal opportunity to complete the survey.

Facebook, a popular social network site with over one billion active users, can be an effective way to reach a large, diverse sample. Within minutes, users from all over the world can directly and indirectly share information, making this

method a valuable tool for research (Bhutta, 2012; Wilson, Gosling & Graham, 2012; Scholl, Mulder & Drent, 2002; West, Lewis & Currie, 2009). Facebook is a new forum for social interaction. It collectively houses many social groups, with people as the focus, that could easily be divided into various contexts; family, co-worker, political party, college friend, church friend, employer and so on (Wilson et al., 2012). As well, "Facebook sampling provides access to some populations that are absent from standard samples because they are too small or too difficult to reach" (Bhutta, 2012, p. 79). This particular diversity is what makes the platform an ideal and perhaps valuable tool for conducting research and information sharing in specific topics, so long as the participants have been adequately informed about the scope of the research and proper consent has been gained (Wilson et al., 2012; Scholl et al., 2002). Although our research was focused in the United States, Facebook reaches international borders, as now 81% of its users are living outside the United States (Facebook, 2012).

Measurement

Media consumption. To measure media consumption we created a 14-item scale that measured the frequency and type of media participants used to obtain political information. Types of media included print, broadcast and online sources. Print items included local and national newspapers and magazines. Broadcast media included network/cable television channels and radio talk shows and commercial radio. Online sources included social media sites, blogs, presidential websites, and other websites. In open-ended questions, participants were also asked to identify the sites they turn to for the most reliable political information.

Political information efficacy. Political information efficacy was measured using a three-item information efficacy index that was previously used by Sweetser & Kaid in a 2008 blog readership study. The scale received a .77 Cronbach's alpha reliability score. This index asked the respondents to provide the extent of political knowledge they feel they possess in order to participate in politics. For example, one survey item stated, "I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country." In keeping with previous research from Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2007), this scale will measure voters' confidence of their political knowledge and how this confidence encourages their participation in the political process.

Political cynicism. Political cynicism was measured using a 7-item Likert scale. This scale was created by Sweetser and Kaid (2008) for a study measuring levels of political cynicism in relation to blog readership. In their study, the scale

received a .65 Cronbach's alpha reliability score. The scale includes a combination of items from National Election Surveys and surveys used by Kaid in previous research (Sweetser & Kaid, 2008). Some survey items dealt with whether the respondent believed they mattered in the political process ("Whether I vote or not has no influence on politics."). Other items dealt with trust of politicians and the political system ("One cannot always trust what politicians say.").

Based on the recommendations of some of the previous literature, another scale was added to test overall cynicism. This five-item, two-point scale was created by Rosenberg in 1957 to test a respondent's level of confidence on issues like trustworthiness and goodness. During this time, he found that those who tested high on the scale were also found to be politically cynical (Wrightsmann, 1991). The scale was reviewed by Wrightsmann in 1991. Items on this scale dealt with how a respondent felt about human nature in general ("If you don't watch yourself, people will take advantage of you.").

Results

A total of 238 respondents completed the survey. Of these, 29.0% (N = 69) were male, 68.9% (N = 164) were female, and 2.1% (N = 5) preferred not to disclose. The mean age was 34.44 (N = 234, SD = 10.113). For ethnicity, 59.7% (N = 142) reported being Caucasian, 12.2% (N = 29) were Hispanic, 3.8% (N = 9) were Asian, 2.9% (N = 7) were African American, 0.4% (N = 1) was Native American, 0.4% (N = 1) was Pacific Islander, 6.7% (N = 16) were more than one ethnicity, 5.9% (N = 14) reported being another ethnicity, and 8.0% (N = 19) preferred not to respond. For highest level of education, 15.5% (N = 37) graduated from high school, 12.6% (N = 30) have an associate's degree, 45.4% (N = 108) have a bachelor's degree, 17.6% (N = 42) have a master's degree, and 7.6% (N = 18) have a doctoral or professional degree. For annual household income, 18.5% (N = 44) earn less than \$25,000 per year, 23.9% (N = 57) earn \$25,000-\$50,000 per year, 18.1% (N = 43) earn \$50,001-\$75,000 per year, 17.6% (N = 42) earn \$75,001-\$100,000 per year, 8.0% (N = 19) earn \$100,001-\$125,000 per year, 4.6% (N = 11) earn \$125,001-\$150,000 per year, and 8.4% (N = 20) earn more than \$150,000 per year. For political affiliation, 46.2% (N = 110) were registered as Democrat, 12.6% (N = 30) were registered as Republican, 8.4% (N = 20) were registered as Independent, 2.1% (N = 5) were registered as Libertarian, 2.1% (N = 5) were registered as Green Party, 19.3% (N = 46) were not affiliated with a party, and 5.0% (N = 12) preferred not to respond.

Table One

How often do you get political news information from each of the following sources?

	Never	Once or twice a month	Once a week	2-3 times per week	4-6 times per week	Once a day	Several times a day
National newspapers (e.g.: New York Times, LA Times, Wall Street Journal)	32.4%	27.1%	16.4%	8.8%	7.1%	5.0%	2.1%
News magazines (e.g.: Time, Newsweek)	40.3%	36.1%	14.3%	5.0%	2.5%	0.4%	0.4%
Local or community newspapers (e.g.: Orange County Register, Pasadena Weekly)	33.6%	19.7%	15.1%	10.9%	8.4%	8.8%	2.1%
Online newspapers (e.g.: nytimes.com)	16.8%	11.3%	13.4%	12.2%	13.4%	15.1%	16.0%
Online news sites (e.g.: cnn.com, msnbc.com)	13.4%	11.3%	15.1%	14.7%	10.9%	14.3%	20.2%
Blogs	38.7%	15.1%	12.2%	10.1%	6.7%	8.4%	8.0%
Political candidate websites	70.6%	20.2%	5.0%	1.3%	1.7%	0%	0.8%
Social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	17.6%	8.8%	7.6%	13.9%	7.1%	12.2%	32.4%
Other websites	20.2%	18.5%	10.1%	13.4%	8.0%	13.9%	13.0%
Cable news (e.g.: Fox News, CNN)	30.3%	17.2%	13.0%	12.6%	9.7%	8.8%	8.0%
Network news (e.g.: ABC, CBS, NBC)	25.6%	14.7%	13.9%	13.4%	10.1%	12.2%	8.8%
Other television	32.8%	16.0%	14.7%	13.4%	6.7%	8.0%	6.3%
Public radio (NPR)	32.4%	9.7%	9.7%	11.3%	7.6%	13.9%	15.1%
Commercial radio	52.1%	13.4%	8.8%	9.2%	5.0%	7.1%	3.4%

*Note: Rows might not add up to 100% due to missing data.

Of the participants, 81.1% voted in the last election and 18.9% did not. The mean likelihood to vote in the next election was 85.45% ($N = 162$, $SD = 31.95$).

The first hypothesis indicated that there was a relationship between intended voter participation and media consumption. Assessment of these results indicated that only two media types support this hypothesis.

Media consumption was measured using the categories shown in Table One. However, to allow for a more representative analysis, each of the categories was converted into the number of times per month that category represented in an average 30-day month. Additionally, a total media consumption score was obtained by summing the scores for all of the individual media types. In order to find out whether any type of media consumption, including overall media consumption, was significantly correlated with likelihood to vote, pairwise correlations with $\alpha = .05$ were run between each media type and likelihood to vote. Likelihood to vote was only significantly correlated with the following two media types: online newspapers ($r = .176$, $p = .025$) and online news sites ($r = .204$, $p = .009$). Thus, only these two types of media consumption can be retained for the regression analysis.

A regression analysis was conducted to find out whether likelihood to vote could be predicted by political cynicism, political information efficacy, online newspaper readership, and online news site readership. The initial regression analysis indicated that neither type of media consumption predicted significant variance in likelihood to vote in the next election, so a second regression was conducted to find out whether likelihood to vote could be predicted by Political Cynicism and Political Information Efficacy. The regression analysis indicated that 19.5% of the variance in Likelihood to Vote could be predicted by Political Cynicism and Political Information Efficacy, $F(2, 159) = 20.56$, $p < .05$. Analysis of regression coefficients indicated that Political Information Efficacy was the strongest predictor, $\beta = .345$, $t = 4.71$, $p < .05$, followed by Political Cynicism, $\beta = -.218$, $t = -2.977$, $p < .05$.

To test how Overall Cynicism affected Likelihood to Vote, a regression analysis was conducted using Political Information Efficacy, Political Cynicism, and Overall Cynicism as the predictor variables. The regression analysis indicated that 20.3% of the variance in Likelihood to Vote could be predicted by Political Cynicism, Political Information Efficacy, and Overall Cynicism, $F(3, 158) = 14.69$, $p < .05$. However, only Political Information Efficacy $\beta = .328$, $t = 4.45$, $p < .05$ and Political Cynicism, $\beta = -.190$, $t = -2.541$, $p < .05$. Overall Cynicism $\beta = -.118$, $t = -1.599$, $p > .05$ was not a significant predictor for Likelihood to Vote.

Next, this study sought to determine the relationship between Political Cynicism and Overall Cynicism. A significant positive correlation was found between these two variables, $r = .272$, $p < .05$.

Table Two

Political Cynicism and Political Information Efficacy by Ethnicity

	Political Cynicism			Political Information Efficacy		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
African American	7	17.29	3.30	7	11.57	2.37
Asian	9	23.22	4.38	9	7.33	1.80
Caucasian	142	22.74	4.37	142	10.66	2.90
Hispanic	29	22.66	5.01	29	9.72	2.49
Native American	1	23.00	.	1	3.00	.
Pacific Islander	1	17.00	.	1	10.00	.
More than one	16	22.44	5.61	16	10.13	2.50
Other	14	21.64	5.56	14	8.36	2.62
Prefer not to respond	19	22.74	3.43	19	10.42	1.92
Total	238	22.48	4.57	238	10.22	2.83

Next, we wanted to find out whether there were differences among ethnicities in Political Cynicism and Political Information Efficacy. Since two ethnicities were represented by only one participant (Native American and Pacific Islander), those ethnicities were excluded from this analysis so that post-hoc tests could be conducted.

First, a ONEWAY ANOVA was conducted to find out whether there was a difference in Political Cynicism among different ethnicities, and the Omnibus F test was not significant, $F(6, 229) = 1.750$, $p > .05$, indicating that no differences in Political Cynicism exist among ethnicities.

For Political Information Efficacy, however, the Omnibus F test was significant, $F(6, 229) = 3.91, p < .05$. Tukey Post Hoc tests, using a Bonferonni adjustment with alpha set at .002 to adjust for family wise inflation of alpha, were used to test for mean differences between groups. Significant differences were found between African Americans and Asians, Asians and Caucasians, and Caucasians and Other. African Americans and Caucasians have significantly higher levels of Political Information Efficacy than Asians, and Caucasians have significantly higher levels of Political Information Efficacy than those who identify their ethnicity as Other.

Next, we wanted to find out whether there were differences among political affiliations in Political Cynicism and Political Information Efficacy.

A ONEWAY ANOVA was conducted to find out whether there were differences in Political Cynicism among political party affiliations. The Omnibus F test was significant, $F(6, 221) = 4.15, p < .05$. Tukey Post Hoc tests, using a Bonferonni adjustment with alpha set at .002 to adjust for family-wise inflation of alpha, were used to test for mean differences between groups. Those who were not affiliated with a political party ($M = 24.74, SD = 5.15, N = 46$) had significantly higher levels of Political Cynicism than did Democrats ($M = 21.15, SD = 3.91, N = 110$).

A ONEWAY ANOVA was conducted to find out whether there were differences in Political Information Efficacy among political party affiliations. The Omnibus F test was significant, $F(6, 221) = 2.42, p < .05$. Tukey Post Hoc tests, using a Bonferonni adjustment with alpha set at .002 to adjust for family wise inflation of alpha, were used to test for mean differences between groups. Members of the Green Party ($M = 13.2, SD = 1.30, N = 5$) had significantly higher levels of Political Information Efficacy than did participants who were not affiliated with a party ($M = 9.20, SD = 2.68, N = 46$).

Discussion

The main goal of this study was to examine how media consumption, political information efficacy, and political cynicism relate to likelihood to vote. The findings show significant positive relationships between both political information efficacy and political cynicism in terms of likelihood to vote. There was no relationship between media consumption and the dependent variable, thus this result rejects the first hypothesis. This section focuses on these findings, as well as the limitations of this research and some recommendations for future research.

Contrary to previous studies, our findings suggest that overall media consumption does not have an effect on voter participation. Political parties spend a significant amount of their budget in broadcast segments unaware that media may not influence voter turnout. In 2008, the Obama campaign raised over seven-hundred million dollars in private funds (Ingram, Queen, & Hilland, 2009); part of that budget went to advertisements on various media outlets. Our study indicated that there are two media formats that have a slightly higher influence on voter participation—online newspapers and online news sites. It is important to mention that these types of media are not considerably correlated to intended voter participation when political information efficacy and political cynicism are accounted.

Our results also found that the leading source from which most participants obtained political information was social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook followed by online newspapers and news sites, as shown in Table One. Our findings indicate that efficacy is the determinant for intended voter participation, therefore it is important to explain the sources that participants seek to obtain information. One-fifth of the respondents of this study indicated that they obtain political information from online news sites several times a day, while 16% of the participants obtain political information from online news sites several times a day.

Such finding is a considerable breakthrough because past studies indicated that newspapers were a leading source for likelihood to vote. Our study found that only 2% of the participants obtain political information from newspapers several times a day and only 27% obtain information from newspapers in a one month span.

Drew and Weaver (2006) found that newspapers alone were associated with likelihood to vote in the 1996 and 2000 elections. They also observed that in 2004 newspapers were a strong predictor but not alone. With the breakthrough of the Internet, newspapers also publish information as an online version. Taking this into consideration, it is reasonable that online newspapers are now a predictor for intended participation (although not accounted when political efficacy and cynicism are measured).

The second area of this study focused on political information efficacy as a predictor for likelihood to vote. As previously supported in other studies (Kaid et al., 2007), there was a significant relationship between information efficacy and the likelihood to vote. Our results indicated that political information efficacy and political cynicism together predicted 19.5% of the variance in likelihood to vote. However, it is important to note that efficacy was the

stronger predictor. Efficacy seems to be the reason why people participate “rather than participation creating the sense of efficacy” (Becker et al., 2009, p. 44). This indicates that Hypothesis Two was supported.

Although not quite as strong as political information efficacy, the results also supported the hypothesis that political cynicism affected likelihood to vote. The results show political cynicism as a negative predictor of voter turnout. This supports the findings of Pinkleton and Austin (2004), but contradicts the study of Fu et al. (2011) on political cynicism in relation to its positive effects. The finding of political cynicism as a negative predictor in likelihood to vote does not support their argument that political cynicism leads to critical thinking on the issues and candidates. Instead, political cynicism may be driving voters away from polling booths.

While there were no differences in political cynicism shown amongst ethnicities, the respondents showed their differences in levels of political cynicism in another way. Compared to Democrats, those who were not affiliated to a political party showed much higher levels of political cynicism. Valentino et al. (2001) reported that the media was more likely to increase levels of political cynicism in nonpartisans. Based on the finding that the media has a much smaller effect than we first thought, there may be other factors involved in increasing political cynicism amongst nonpartisans.

Finally, based on limited research on the connection between political cynicism and overall cynicism (Hansen et al., 2010; Agger et al., 1961), one goal of this research was to fill the void on the relationship between these two variables. The findings show a correlation between them. However, overall cynicism was not related to likelihood to vote. Cynicism may encourage political cynicism, but it is political cynicism that discourages voter turnout. This supports findings from Hansen et al. (2010) that state that a person’s individual characteristics affect political cynicism.

Limitations

One considerable limitation for media consumption was that slanted media was not included in the measurement. Inclusion of such media could have provided alternative results. It also must be noted that our sample was found on a social networking site, which could explain the high numbers of online news media consumption amongst our respondents. Another factor to take into consideration is the current political climate. This study was conducted several months before the 2012 presidential election; therefore, perhaps participants

were not exposed to as much political advertisements as they would be if the election were closer.

Although our study found that media consumption as a variable did not have any effect on political cynicism nor political information efficacy nor was it a factor in the likelihood to vote, there is still contradictory evidence to support our initial thought. In a study conducted by Kaid et al. (2007) it was suggested that “exposure to television advertising, like exposure to debates, increases young citizen’s confidence in their political information and knowledge and significantly increases the likelihood that they will engage in the political process by voting.”

Another limitation to our study relied on the use of a sample from various geographical areas and a wide range in age, thus to include a variety of states where citizens are affected by government in different ways, our variables were not as defined or controlled as found in one specific region. This could explain why we had such a significantly low level of media consumption affecting the likelihood to vote, when accounting for obtaining political information and in turn affecting political information efficacy. That is to say, citizenry in general and those within the various demographics are driven by the social standards in each state or region.

The sample was not random and, as is normally the case in this situation, the participants were not representative of the United States population. Some were overrepresented (women and voters) and others were underrepresented (Republicans and African Americans). One final note on the participants: as mentioned: they are much more politically involved than the general public. These findings may be more important when considering how those who are interested in politics as well as those who vote are affected by these three variables. It may be that non-voters are affected by these three variables in different ways. It should also be mentioned that likelihood to vote does not necessarily mean they will vote in the next election.

Another major limitation was the lack of scale reliability for both political cynicism and overall cynicism. The overall cynicism scale had been tested in 1991, but was created over 50 years ago. It is not surprising that this scale may need to be re-evaluated. However, the political cynicism scale was a much more recent creation (Sweetser & Kaid, 2008). The political environment may be changing so rapidly that it is time to create a new scale for political cynicism.

Future Research

A significant number of the respondents received most of their political news from online news sources. More research is needed to see if this is actually the case or if the use of social media as the survey distributor may have skewed the results. The survey included a large number of young respondents, which calls for more research on how social media may be useful in reaching out to young voters. Facebook and other social media websites are still relatively new, but they are increasingly becoming important in understanding how individuals (especially the members of the younger generations) communicate. Scholars have recently found validation in the use of social media to conduct network sampling (Bhutta, 2012), but more research must be done on other ways to use social media websites to conduct communication research.

While political information efficacy and political cynicism are shown to be predictors in likelihood to vote, they were only about a 20% motivator. Future studies should consider looking into other factors that influence likelihood to vote, especially because media is a much smaller influence than expected. Other variables that should be explored more include education, perception of the candidates, and the amount a person works per week. More research also needs to be done on how informed an individual is as opposed to how informed an individual feels they are. It is important to consider non-voters in this research as well because they may be influenced differently than those who vote.

Another area that deserves more research is the relationship between political cynicism and critical thinking. Does one cause the other? Is the emphasis on critical thinking skills in the classroom and workplace affecting the political cynicism of voters? Or do people tend to think critically only when they are interested in the subject? Are voters thinking critically about all issues or only some? Also, the connection with political cynicism and overall cynicism must be explored more to support or refute the finding that the two are connected.

Conclusion

Voter participation will always be an important issue to a democratic nation. The current voter turnout is around 40% of the population. Understanding the reason this number is so low may help scholars figure out how to increase participation. This study linked both political information efficacy and political cynicism to likelihood to vote, but revealed no link between media consumption and likelihood to vote. This shows that what some researchers believe to be

common knowledge may not be true at all. As politicians continue to spend millions of dollars on media campaigns encouraging the public to vote for them, they must consider how these campaigns affect political information efficacy and political cynicism.

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